



## MEDIA RELEASE

March 29, 2021

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

#### **SAFETY MEASURES IN PLACE FOR EASTER CELEBRATIONS**

*Catholics across Northern Ontario begin Holy Week leading to Easter Sunday*

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie has implemented directives that will allow Catholics to celebrate Holy Week while following safety measures and all COVID-19 restrictions. Holy Week includes the most important celebrations in the Catholic calendar which follow the final steps of Jesus leading to his death and resurrection.

“Last year, we were unable to celebrate these holy days due to the lockdown, so we eagerly anticipate being able to mark these celebrations, although with strict safety measures in place” said Bishop Thomas Dowd, the Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie.

While churches will be open for public celebrations, adaptations have been made for each celebration. On Easter Sunday, the day that Catholics mark the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, new water is blessed and traditionally sprinkled on the faithful people as a reminder of their baptism.

This year, following the success of distributing blessed ashes for people to bring home at the beginning of Lent, churches will provide bottles of blessed water for Catholics to take home with them to bless themselves at home with the rest of their family or members of their household. They will also be given a short prayer service and a small candle to pray with at home.

“These are important rituals at Easter for the faithful people that we do not want to completely forego” said Bishop Dowd, “and we want to include those who are still not comfortable returning to church as well.”

Other ceremonial changes during each Mass have also been directed by the Diocese, in accordance with current safety measures. On Holy Thursday, priests would traditionally wash the feet of parishioners, following the example of Jesus who washed the feet of his Apostles, however this year this ceremony will be omitted.

On Good Friday, while Catholics typically come forward individually to honour a large wooden cross, in remembrance of the cross that Jesus died on, this will take place communally and from a safe distance.

On the eve of Easter, during the highest celebration of the church year, traditionally a fire burns outside of churches, and the inside of the church is illuminated by candle light that attendees pass from person to person. This year, this tradition will also be omitted.

Catholic churches are also adhering to the current capacity restrictions, as well as social distancing and mandatory mask measures. Many churches will offer live-streaming of the Holy Week celebrations.

“While our celebrations may be different this year, we also recognize the joy that the Risen Jesus brings to each one of our lives, even in a time of pandemic,” said Bishop Dowd, “Easter allows us to focus on the hope our faith brings to us, despite the ongoing challenges we are facing.”

Catholics are encouraged to check with their nearest Catholic church to see available times for Holy Week celebrations, and when to pick up bottles of holy water along with a prayer service and small candle. For more information, to see a copy of the prayer service, or to watch a tutorial video, visit: [www.dioceseofsaultstemarie.org](http://www.dioceseofsaultstemarie.org)

- 30 -

### **Additional Information for Media:**

#### *Why these changes for Holy Week?*

Given the current COVID-19 restrictions, the Diocese of Sault Ste. Marie has implemented these changes for the safety of all attending Holy Week gatherings in their churches.

#### *How will families receive the bottles of holy water?*

Similar to how parishioners picked up the blessed ashes on Ash Wednesday, people are invited to pick up a bottle of blessed water and a printed prayer service brochure from their nearest Catholic church. They are invited to check available times for pick up from their nearest church.

#### *What is Holy Week?*

Holy Week is the week-long celebration commemorating the journey of Jesus toward his crucifixion and resurrection. It is the holiest time of the Christian faith, which begins on Palm Sunday (March 28) and ends on Easter Sunday (April 4).

*When are Holy Week celebrations in each church?*

Catholics are encouraged to check with their nearest local church for the dates and times of the celebrations of Holy Week.

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***Caption:***

Fr. Daniele Muscolino leads the blessing of the fire at the Easter Vigil Mass at Holy Name of Jesus Church in North Bay, Ontario in April 2019.

*Caption:*  
Catholics gather for the Easter Vigil Mass at Holy Name of Jesus Church  
in North Bay, Ontario in April 2019.

